

Osaka International Church
Bradford Houdyshel
Title: Message to Christian Husbands

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Key verses:

Ephesians 5:25, 28-29 (NASB) – “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her . . . ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.”

1st Peter 3:7 (NASB) – “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

Good morning, everyone. Once again we are broadcasting our worship service and sermon on You Tube rather than meeting together as a church. For a long time, I have been wanting to share with my church family the key points of one of my favorite books: a book written to Christian husbands that tells us what the Bible says about being a husband and what the responsibilities of a husband are. Although I was attending a great Bible-believing church during my college and post-college years – and I had heard many sermons about Christian marriage as described in Ephesians 5 and 1st Peter 3 – when I read this book in my mid-20’s, it had a radical effect on my thinking.

The book is entitled *If Only He Knew*, written by Gary Smalley. I attribute my happy marriage to this book. Well, actually, a happy marriage cannot be attributed to just a book . . . of course, the main thing you need for a happy marriage is for both husband and wife to be totally committed to Christ and to seriously follow His word. But, in addition to that, this book certainly has played a major role in how I have approached my marriage and why it is a stable union.

The number one most important principle I learned from this book is that 100% of the responsibility for harmony in a marriage belongs to the husband. What? One hundred percent? I was really surprised the first time I read that. Really: ALL of the responsibility for harmony at home belongs to the husband? Surely that can’t be right. I mean: the wife has to play her part too, doesn’t she? Both a man and a woman can make errors - or sins - and either one of them could disrupt the marriage. How can *all* of the responsibility for harmony in the household be on the man’s shoulders? Well, for the simple reason that he has the God-given task of being the head of the household. As I read through this book, I found that in chapter after chapter, the author would begin with a proposition that I thought was far too hard to accept, but . . . after I came to the end of each chapter, I had to agree with what the author had just outlined. This lesson that all of the responsibility for harmony belongs to the husband was one of those propositions. Well, I did not get married until 20 years after reading this book - at age 48 - but a few months after we got married, while we were eating dinner, Toshie turned to me and said quietly, “This house is *peaceful*.” The change in atmosphere from her parents’ place had evidently made a big impression on her.

Well, when I went away to college, I was introduced to a wonderful evangelical church that stressed expository preaching, verse by verse, through the books of the Bible. And I learned that the supreme passage in the New Testament about marriage relationships is Ephesians chapter 5, verses 22-33. Let’s read the whole passage. As we read this passage, please note that the section on husbands is much longer than the section on wives. Husbands have more responsibility. Beginning at verse 22 . . .

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Eph. 5:22-33, NIV)

Notice that I have highlighted verse 25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and...gave...himself...up...for...her.” **Love** your wives. **In the same way that Christ** loved the church. As Christ **sacrificed and died for** the church. The beginning point of this book *If Only He Knew* is that truly loving and valuing your wife is the foundation of a successful marriage.

While I was meditating on this verse, I noted that husbands are to love their wives *in a self-sacrificing way*, even to the point of *dying to one’s own ambitions and desires*, if that is necessary. Of course, we see something like this modeled in many marriages, where the husband works hard to provide financially for his family. Unfortunately, I’ve seen marriages where the husbands are selfish and they spend so much of their resources on selfish pursuits like gambling or drinking or on their hobbies. No - that should not be so. Very often, I have seen wives sacrificing for their families, but we must remember that Biblically, it is the husband who is specifically told to sacrifice himself for his wife.

The other verses I highlighted are verses 28 and 29. “...Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.” Hey, men: do you *love yourself* ... and do you spend time and energy *for your own body*? Remember, you must love HER *with the same amount of concern* as you do for yourself. Continuing verse 28: “...He who loves his wife loves himself.” He is loving himself when he shows concern for and takes care of his wife.

Verse 29 (let me quote it in the New American Standard Bible): “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.” Most guys don’t hate themselves - they *nourish* and *cherish* themselves. Well, with the same amount of energy you spend taking care of yourself, you should do for your wife as well: you are to **nourish her** ... and to **cherish her**. Christ is our example here: He cared for and taught the people. And He died for them. *Died for them* ... to purchase redemption. Christ died for us – the least that we husbands can do is sacrifice for our wives and provide for their needs.

Have you ever thought about what the background is to this word “husband”? Many years ago, I noticed in the old King James Version of the Bible that this word popped up in some unusual places. For example, at the beginning of John chapter 15, Jesus says this: “I am the true vine, and

my Father is the husbandman.” *My Father is the husbandman*. What is meant by this word *husbandman*? Modern English translations of the Bible say “...My Father is the *vinedresser*.” God the Father is the vinedresser, the cultivator who digs in the ground, plants and cares for the grapevine, and harvests the grapes. The King James Version calls this person the husbandman.

In James 5:7, the King James Bible says this: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.” There is that word *husbandman* again. He is digging in the earth cultivating crops, being patient as they grow, and enjoying the harvest.

There is a branch of agriculture called “animal husbandry.” *Animal husbandry*. The dictionary defines this as “The science of breeding and caring for farm animals.” Breeding and caring for.

That’s the original background of this word “husband”: an agricultural term for a farmer cultivating crops and a breeder raising animals. Cultivation.

I take a lesson from this for marriage. Men – we are to be cultivating our wives. Are you helping her to grow as a person, to grow as a Christian? Are you providing an atmosphere at home where she can be nurtured? Usually, we think of the wife as the nurturing one, and indeed she often does that task well with the children and she cares for her husband, too. But this word husband originally referred to a cultivator. Ephesians 5:29 says that men are not only nourishing and cherishing themselves, but that they are supposed to be *nourishing and cherishing their wives*. Men – are you doing that?

When I was young and idealistic, I read this passage in Ephesians 5 and I saw the opening verses telling wives that they are to “submit to their husbands in everything.” Well, that made some sense to me, since I saw in my family and other families that the father is the head of the household and the boss.

And in Genesis chapter 2 we see the creation of the woman, who is said to be a helper for Adam. Genesis 2:18 (NIV) says this: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’.” “... I will make a helper suitable for him.” The King James Bible says: “...I will make him an help meet for him.” *An help meet for him*. A “help meet” – it is from this phrase that we get the word *helpmate*, often used to refer to a wife. The woman was fashioned from Adam’s rib to be a helper for him. Such is the idea that we have had of woman’s place, of her purpose. And then we read Ephesians 5:22: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.” And the beginning of verse 23: “For the husband is the head of the wife ...” It would be easy to get the impression that woman was made to be the assistant to the man.

I came of age in the 1970’s, when the feminist movement was in full swing and conservative homes like my own were reacting against it. We saw Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5 as saying that women are to help their husband and are to submit to him, plain and simple. Eventually, I noticed that some Christian women sometimes react unfavorably to this teaching that the wife is to submit to her husband. I wondered: were such women being disobedient to the Bible? I once heard a young preacher say that he when he saw some women complaining about this injunction

“wives submit to your husbands,” he immediately thought that these women had disobedient hearts ... but as he continued his story, he told us that eventually he came to realize that *the real reason* for these women’s negative reaction was *the misuse some men were making* of that injunction. They were using Ephesians 5:22 to enforce their will over their wives. Some of these men were selfishly domineering over their wives. Other men were naive, idealistic young men who thought that this verse means they can just snap their fingers and their wife, their helpmate, will jump up and do whatever task he wants done, big or small. I once thought like this, too ... but I, too, in my mid-20’s, had begun to notice the same thing that that young preacher had noticed: the women complaining about this verse weren’t complaining about the Bible but about how some husbands were mishandling that verse.

Let me share with you a real life experience from Gary Smalley, the author of this book. He was once a young, idealistic Christian man who thought Ephesians 5:22 meant he could expect his wife to obey everything he said. Here is a story he wrote in the book:

It was 4:00 P.M. on Valentine’s Day when I remembered my basketball game [which I was playing in that night]. I reached for the phone to call Norma, my bride of less than a year.

“Honey, I forgot to tell you I have a basketball game tonight. We’re supposed to be there about 7:00. I’ll pick you up about 6:30.”

Silence hung heavily on the line before she answered, “But this is Valentine’s Day.”

“Yeah, I know, but I need to be there tonight because I promised the team. I don’t want to let them down.”

“But I have a special dinner prepared with candles and —”

“Can you hold it off until tomorrow?” She didn’t answer, so I continued. “Honey, you know how important it is for a wife to submit to her husband... I really need to be there tonight, and if we’re going to start off with good habits in the early part of our marriage, now is the time to begin. If I’m going to be the leader of this family, I need to make the decision.”

“Ice” perfectly describes the reception I received when I picked her up. It was easy to see I had severely offended her, but I figured she had to learn to be submissive sometime, and we might as well start now...

Little did I know that one of the worst things a husband can do is demand submission from his wife...

When I first read this story, it was clear to me that the problem was not the wife’s failure to be submissive but the husband’s failure to show simple consideration for the time and effort his sweetheart had put into making that Valentine’s dinner. I am really grateful that I read this and similar stories before I got married. Submission by the wife doesn’t mean she is expected to follow his every desire. Men need to show some consideration.

So, husbands, I have something to say to you. Here’s a word of admonition:

Don’t read other people’s mail. Don’t read other people’s mail. Don’t read Ephesians 5:22-24 as something that you can expect from your wife. And certainly don’t quote it to her and demand that she follow it. No – the Apostle Paul is addressing wives in those verses. He is not addressing you. So, husbands, don’t focus on these verses. Don’t read other people’s mail.

Instead, read your own mail. Are you following Ephesians 5:25-33?

Verse 25: are you loving your wife and sacrificing your very life for her?

Verses 26 & 27: are you doing whatever you can to make her a holy vessel, without blemish, a good, faithful Christian?

Verse 28: do you love her the same as you love yourself?

Verse 29: do you nourish and cherish her?

Verse 31: do you truly leave your father and mother behind and make your relationship with your wife *the number one human relationship* you have on this earth?

Verse 33 closes this section with an admonition to both the husband and the wife. The primary thing a husband must remember is to love his wife as much as he loves his own self. And this verse says a wife must ... well, it doesn't say "submit" here ... the final word for a wife says that she must be sure to respect her husband. Respect is very important. By the way, my wife tells me that if a woman can respect her man, then it is easy to stay with him. And Toshie says that a woman needs someone whom she can respect. So, men, I say to you: try to be that kind of person, be someone a woman can respect.

Let me return to Genesis 2 and the creation of the woman to be, as the King James Bible says, "an help meet" for the man, or as the New King James Version says, "a helper comparable to him." The New American Standard Bible says she is "a helper suitable for him." Comparable to him ... suitable for him ... an help meet for him. What exactly does this mean?

The Hebrew word here is *ezer kenegdo* (עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ). According to the commentator Adam Clarke, this term means that for the man, the woman is "a help, a counterpart of himself, one formed from him, and a perfect resemblance of his person... And this implies that the woman was to be a perfect resemblance of the man, possessing neither inferiority nor superiority, but being in all things like and equal to himself." Woman is a *counterpart* ... a *perfect resemblance* of the man ... and this does not imply "inferiority nor superiority, but *being in all things like and equal to himself.*" *In all things like and equal to himself.* She is not a second-class citizen, she is not a servant to the man. She is a perfect resemblance of him. A perfect *partner*.

Here is something else: this Hebrew word *ezer* is sometimes used to describe what God is to us. For example, in Psalm 40 (NASB), in the second half of verse 17, David says this about God: "You are my help [*ezer*] and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God." Psalm 33:20 (NASB) says, "Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help [*ezer*] and our shield." (See also Psalm 115:9-11). And in Exodus 18:3-4, Moses names his two sons – one son is called Gershon, and verse 4 says, "The other [son] was named Eliezer, for he said, "The God of my father was my help [*ezer*], and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." The name Eliezer means "God my help."

A helper is *someone who has something to offer to a person who needs help*. And since God has been called our helper, this shows that a "helper" is not a person of inferior position. So it is with the woman fashioned from Adam's rib. She is not inferior to him. She has something to offer him because he needs help. They are partners.

I wish I could read more verses for you from Genesis 1 and 2, but I don't have time to read them all. I hope you can see them on the PowerPoint screen ...

Genesis 1:26-28 (NIV) – “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’.”

Genesis 1:26-28 tells us that mankind – both male and female – are created in the image of God. And together they are to rule over all the animals ... they are to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and to subdue it. Together God has given male and female the responsibility to rule the earth.

Genesis 2 gives more details. God created the man first.

Genesis 2:7-8 (NIV) – “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.” Gen. 2:15 – “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

Genesis 2:7-8 tells us that God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, and that God planted the Garden of Eden in the east and put the man there to work the ground and take care of it. This is his first task.

Genesis 2:19-20 (NIV) – “Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.”

Adam had another task. He was given the task of naming the animals. Among the animals we can assume that there were males and females. Then we read in verse 20, “...But for Adam no suitable helper was found.” Each of the animals had a mate, but he did not. So verses 21 and 22 tell us that God put Adam to sleep and fashioned a woman from his rib.

There is a really heartwarming poem about this that I really like. It was written by the famous commentator Matthew Henry and it goes like this:

The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam;
not made out of his head to rule over him,
nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him,
but out of his side to be equal with him,
under his arm to be protected,
and near his heart to be beloved.

Look again at what God said in chapter 1, verse 28.

Genesis 1:28 (NIV) – “God blessed them [the man and woman] and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’.”

God gave a joint command to both the man and the woman: to be fruitful and fill the earth, and to subdue the earth and rule over it – being stewards of God’s creation.

They are to be doing this *together*.

I now wish to move back to the New Testament and read an admonition to husbands from the Apostle Peter. In 1st Peter 3:7 (NASB) we read this – “You husbands likewise, live with your

wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.” The New International Version says “...be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect...”

First of all: be understanding, be considerate, of your wife. Show honor to her.

Secondly (this is interesting): the two of you are “*fellow heirs* of the grace of life.” They share in this life together, they rule the earth together. They are “fellow heirs.” Let’s not consider women as inferior. Your wife is your partner in life.

A few minutes ago, I shared with you a big mistake Gary Smalley made on Valentine’s Day during his first year of marriage. Well, he also told other stories of other mistakes he made in his marriage. After describing one of these incidents, he tells us what he learned from his wife:

She helped me discover how I was violating the biblical principle found in 1 Peter 3:7, and since then I’ve come to realize that it’s the cornerstone of all relationships! *Grant her honor*. Honor basically means to attach high value, worth, or importance to a person or thing. Norma felt less important than my vocation and activities. Without realizing it, I was not honoring her as the most important person in my life...

This was another crucially important lesson I learned from this book: the cornerstone of all relationships! *Grant her honor*.

My ESV Study Bible has this note about verse 7: “... ‘*To live ... in an understanding way*’ probably focuses on living in accord with God’s will, which includes understanding the needs of a wife. Interpreters differ over whether ‘*weaker vessel*’ means weaker in terms of delegated authority, emotions, or physical strength. Peter is probably thinking of the general truth that men are physically stronger than women and may be tempted to threaten their wives through physical or verbal abuse. Women and men share an equal destiny as ‘*heirs ... of the grace of life*.’ Peter does not think women are inferior to men, for both are equally made in God’s image (cf. Gal. 3:28). If husbands do not treat their wives in a godly way, the Lord will pay no heed to their prayers.” (Excerpt From: Crossway. “ESV® Study Bible.”).

And the Apostle Peter finishes his admonition by saying husbands should do these things “... so that your prayers will not be hindered.” If you are disrespectful and inconsiderate to your wife, God may refrain from answering your prayers.

Before I close, I want to share one more lesson from this book *If Only He Knew*.

As I read through this book again last week in preparation for my message today, it was remarkable to me how often the men who came to Gary Smalley for counseling would be so resistant to the recommendations he made for how to restore their failing marriages. Gary told them they had to change certain habits or attitudes, but these men often thought that it was just impossible to do. One of these cases was a man named George, who was in the process of being divorced by his wife. In an early discussion with George, Gary asked him a simple question. Here is the story:

I asked, "Do you want your wife back?"

"Yes, I'd do anything to get her back."

"Good. I'm always willing to work with someone ready to readjust his life..." Again he committed himself to to change, but his commitment didn't last beyond my next statement, "We're going to have to work on your domineering and possessive nature. It shows you don't genuinely love your wife."

He fumed and spouted, defended and fought so much that I began to wonder if he really would commit himself to the necessary changes.

Well, George's wife had already begun divorce proceedings, so he had to go to court for the divorce hearing. Gary went there also, and he continues the story:

Two of his friends and I waited in the courthouse for the closed-room session to end. He came running out of the courtroom bellowing, "She wants twenty percent of my retirement benefits ... twenty percent! No way I'm gonna do that!"

Once again I asked him, "Do you want your wife back?" Again, he nodded yes! I said, "Then give her twenty-five percent." I reminded him that *now* was the time to respect her and treat her sensitively. Later, he emerged from the courtroom a divorced man, but not for long.

Several months later I ran into him at the grocery store. "My wife and I remarried," he said triumphantly. "I thought you were crazy when you first told me the things I should do for my wife ... there was no way I would ever be able to do them," he continued. "It took sheer will power at first. I only did them because you said God rewards those who seek Him and follow His ways. But you know, it's really amazing. After doing them for three months, I actually enjoy them." ...

George has finally realized that his wife is a special person who needs tender treatment, almost as if her forehead were stamped "Very Important – Handle With Care"! He has discovered the secret to renewing any strained relationship – honor.

The secret to any strained relationship: Honor. That is a word that repeatedly shows up in this book. The importance of honoring your wife. She needs to know that you value her. She needs to know that she is number one in your life. If she doesn't feel that, there will be stresses in your relationship that may be insurmountable. But if she knows that you love her and value her and honor her, you can win her heart. But she needs to be able to see it in your actions.

Another thing I find interesting in this story is how George complained that the things Gary wanted him to do seemed impossible. George said:

"I thought you were crazy when you first told me the things I should do for my wife ... there was no way I would ever be able to do them... But you know, it's really amazing. After doing them for three months, I actually enjoy them."

Actually, there are a number of stories in this book that report this: it took effort at first to do the things prescribed, but after a while, the man reports that he actually enjoys doing those things now. Later in the book, Gary tells his own story of discovering this his own marriage.

Love your wife. Honor her. Value her. Be tender. Be sensitive. And make sure you show it in practical ways that she can see. And if your heart is really in it, you'll discover you like doing these things. George discovered this. Gary discovered this. And I discovered this.

That's all for today's message.

This book "If Only He Knew" by Dr. Gary Smalley is available in both paperback and Kindle editions at both Amazon.co.jp and Amazon.com. I highly recommend that all Christian men read it.